ONCE BOUGHT, ALWAYS BOUGHT.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 306.] FOR WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 10, 1894. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

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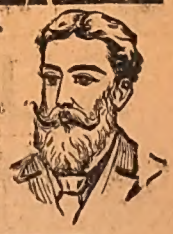

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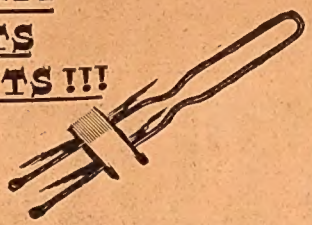

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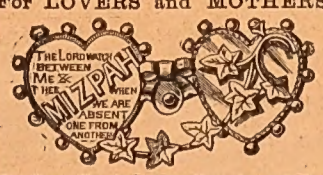

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E. T. TOWLE, Chemist, NOTTINGHAM.

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No case hopeless, failure is simply impossible, as Mrs. Snow, of Denmark Hill, Camberwell, writes:—

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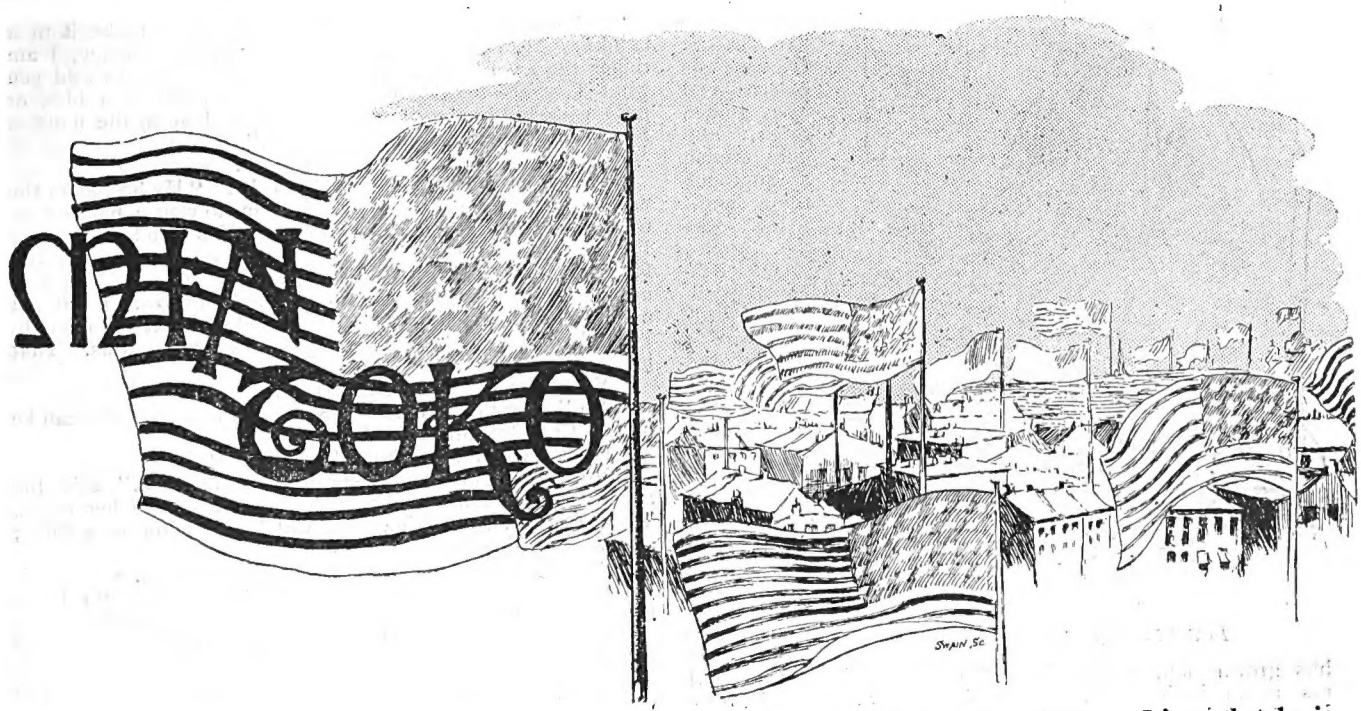
No. 306.] *FOR THE WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 10, 1894.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.



IT is Fourth of July in San Francisco, the Anniversary of the Independence of the United States. The clear, blue sky, like a mammoth bowl cut from one great turquoise and turned over the town, is a background for thousands of flags floating from the roofs of public buildings, and the windows of private patriots.

All the flags are big. Everything is on a large scale in California, the fruit that is exposed for sale, the great roses that enamoured youths are buying for their adored ones. The children are playing in the streets with mighty crackers, that make an explosion calculated to deafen one.

Large men, with ample ladies on their arms, may be seen in every direction. Immense baskets are being borne to the doors of their customers by grocers, butchers, and confectioners.

Immense suppers are to be given to-night, and many happy returns of the glorious Fourth will be drunk in rivers of champagne. Everything is on a large scale but the Chinese, whose small figures and alert movements are in marked contrast to the bulk and size of everything else on which the eye falls.

Yet little Washy-Washy balances on his head a clothes-basket that would serve him for a cradle, or in his kitchen—for he is a favourite cook with California housewives—stirs a pot in which he might easily be boiled himself.

In the arms of San Francisco sleeps Chinatown, the curious offspring of old China, of which Americans think that they know all that is to be known because they can visit the shops, and go into all the strange places, and, if they are in the humour, make themselves sick with an opium pipe among opium-smoking Chinamen.

Vain delusion! The secret soul of the Chinaman remains hidden here in China as in the Flowery Kingdom. No one will ever be able to guess what he thinks or how much he knows, how wicked he is, or how virtuous. I fancy that he is at once a great deal better and a great deal worse than we know, and that a learned and wise Chinee—who, by the way, does not usually keep a laundry—knows many things which would curdle the blood of our scientists and make their flesh creep, if he could be prevailed upon to impart them; but that he never will. The outside barbarian will remain in darkness for all his teaching. He will never be the schoolmaster abroad.

Fourth of July in Chinatown, though little the "haythen" would care for it, but that "Melicky-man" is his customer for fireworks about this time, and that thus the day adds good money to the hoard which he will at last spend in his native country amongst the tea-gardens and the pagodas, where, in his old age, he will catch insects to feed pet singing birds or fly curious paper kites, while his grandchildren watch him with reverence and listen to his stories of that queer place, America, as our little ones do to fairy tales.

But as gold is as mighty there in Chinatown as elsewhere, Fourth of July becomes important, and in the shops in which are sold all those packages and sticks and boxes, wrapped in paper of brilliant colours, the proprietors are on the alert.

Fourth of July. In his laboratory Lin Ham is at work, putting the finishing touches to material for the grand display, which is to be an unusually fine one, and to the work for several private exhibitions also.

Lin Ham is not an ordinary dealer. He keeps no shop. He executes orders for the favoured few. In each he puts a surprise—an invention for the day.

His are the curious boats, all made of coloured fire, moving on the water, apparently by means of a stream of fire at the stern, manned by little men in blue and gold and crimson, and all going off in a wonderful flash and whiz and splutter at last.

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In his laboratory, Lin Ham is at work.

His are those cylinders, which, rising into the air, discharge wonderful sprays and stars, and jewels skywards, while, at the same time, fiery little acrobats let themselves earthward by golden ropes, and only vanish as they touch the ground.

His was the great, green dragon that coiled and darted moonward, and wrote "July" across the sky before it changed into the flag of the American nation, which everyone so admired last Independence day.

Lin Ham has grown rich, it is said, and certainly his costume and his home indicate it. The table at which he is busy is full of his handiwork, his bronze utensils are highly decorated, he uses implements of gold and silver for some purposes. Everything about him is dainty. A screen, covered with curious devices, shields his doorway from the gaze of the curious; and across the middle of the room runs a bronze rod, from which swings what may be either a sign indicating his business or a charm to banish evil spirits, or, as one never knows what a Chinaman means, an invitation to the power of darkness to come to his aid. Below this, an opalescent lantern glitters in the sun.

At present something that smells very curiously is smoking and steaming in a queer fashion, in what looks like a little furnace, and Lin Ham, while still busy with his hands, twists his head about, and blinks up into the face of a tall man in a curious, theatrical costume, who stands with his bare arms folded on his chest, and looks down upon him.

"Such things are costly," he says. "I do not say that I have anything of the sort, but, if I had, you would not buy them, Min Toko."

They are speaking in Chinese, for Min Toko, though not a child of Chinese parents, has been brought up by them. You can believe the story that his father was a Russian and his mother a Tartar, when you look at him.

A little Chinese boatwoman took him from his dying mother's arms, and nursed him with her own, somewhere near those quarters where there are English warehouses, and the barbarian comes to traffic in tea and porcelain, and he starved and played and swam about with her own, and early in his boyhood came to San Francisco.

There he dwelt in Chinatown, and became renowned amongst the showmen of San Francisco for his acrobatic feats. To-night he is engaged to assist in a performance on the lawn before the mansion of Benson Blashfield, Esq.

Mr. Blashfield will have fireworks and a great supper, and the crowning feature will be the feats of Min Toko, who, amongst other things, throws a rope into the air, where it is caught by some unseen power, sends a kitten up its length until it vanishes from sight, sends a monkey to find it, follows himself, and draws up the rope after him, and ten minutes after is heard calling from the inside of a great lacquered box to be let out, and there he is indeed, coiled up like a great serpent.

Oh, there is nothing Min Toko cannot do, and no one ever discovered how he does anything.

Now he laughs.

"I know you have what I want, or can make it in a twinkling, Lin Ham," he answers. "As for money, I am richer than you think. Name your price. I have told you what I want—to kill a man without a knife or a blow or poison—to kill him so that it seems to be done by the hand of Fate; so that no one can suspect me."

"Is he a Chinaman," asks Lin Ham.

"He is an American," said Min Toko. "He has taken the woman I love from me. This rich man, to whose house I go to-night, has a daughter. I love her. You grin! Why not? I am handsome; I am no Chinaman; I am famous; I am a favourite with the ladies, and she smiled on me. You grin again. Of course, the rich man would say, No. I did not mean to ask the rich man. If she loved me, that was enough. I could spirit her away where they would never find us. That is what I meant to do."

"You are mad!" says Lin Ham.

"No," says the acrobat. "She could be won. She can be still, if I can kill this man."

"Do you mean her father?" cries Lin Ham.

"No. To-night they celebrate her marriage," said the acrobat. "To-morrow the bridegroom will take her away. To-night I must kill him. She will be a widow for awhile; afterwards, mine."

"It is the dream of a madman," says Lin Ham.

"Does that matter to you?" asks the acrobat. "I know that it was you who made the toy the rich tea merchant gave to his wife when he found she was false to him. The little bird that perched on her wrist and sang and bit her fingers like a real bird, and of the bite she died. I know it was you who——"

"No more reminiscences!" cries Lin Ham. "I admit that I have another toy that, with a slight addition, which I could make in ten minutes, would wipe your rival out of existence. But of what avail would it be? Rich American ladies do not marry such as you. Her relatives would kill you if you touched her hand."

"I have kissed it thrice when we were alone," says Min Toko. "Yes, I have kissed her hands three times. The next time it should have been her mouth. Let me kill this bridegroom so that she cannot suspect me, and it shall be yet. Look!" He thrusts his hand into the bosom of his tunic and draws forth a pouch. "See!" he whispers, piling bank-notes before Lin Ham. "How much for that toy?"

The eyes of the old man glitter. He gathers up the heap in his claw-like hands, and says slowly:

"This sum makes me have enough with which to return to China, and live there happy for the rest of my life. After all, what does one more dead barbarian matter! But I will tell you this: Unless you can make your rival take the toy in his own hands, it is useless."

"I can manage that," Min Toko replies.

The old Chinaman goes to a little recess in the room, before which hangs a beaded screen, and comes back, holding in his hand a curious kite.

"You fly it like any other kite," he explains. "When at its full length you begin to call: 'Come down, butterfly.' A butterfly descends the cord and flies away. 'Follow rose,' you say. A rose glides down the string and drops to ashes. 'Come down, pretty mouse,' you call next. The mouse descends and runs up your shoulder and is gone.

"Then you call for a blue bird, for a white bird, for a green bird, for a yellow bird. Thus it might end with the applause of the people. But let me work upon this kite ten minutes

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longer, and add one trifle more, and then there will be something else to see.

"Then you may call aloud: 'Come to me out of the sky, bright star.' And far above you may see a star shine, bright as any in the heavens. At this moment, he whom you wish to kill must hold the cord, and that star brings death. As it touches the man's breath life departs from him. Mark me well, the other things that come down the cord are innocent as drops of dew. The star is fatal."

"I understand," replied Min Toko. "Hasten with your work, Lin Ham."

A little later the old Chinaman puts into the hands of the younger man a paper box covered with shining roses, butterflies, and birds, and says to him:—

"Min Toko, the great performer, you have bought of me a pretty kite, which brings down from the heavens the birds of the air, and the flowers the spirits pluck. For all I know you may coax the stars down its cord also. It is well made. If any accident happens, that is the fault of others, not mine, I am not responsible."

"I absolve you from all responsibility, Lin Ham," replied Min Toko.

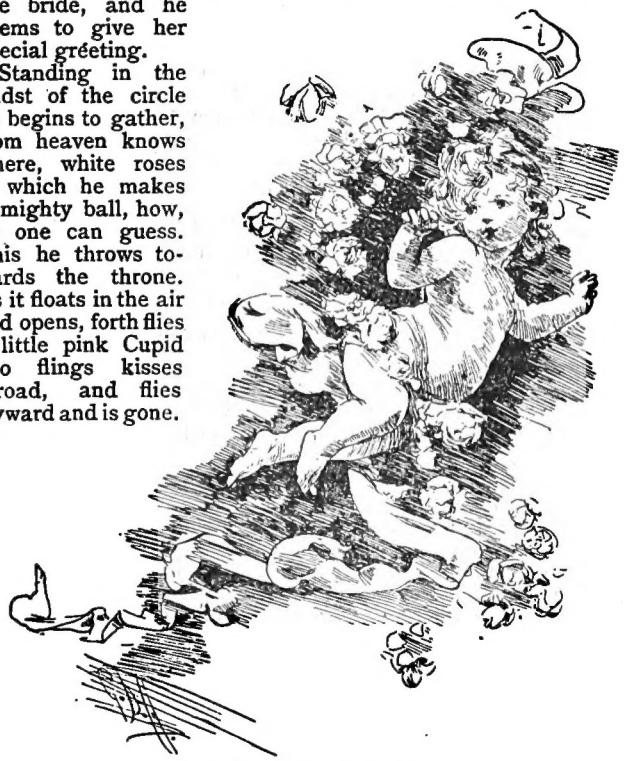
He throws about him a cloak that covers his theatrical costumes, and carries the box downstairs, where a carriage containing the paraphernalia used in his exhibitions awaits him, and is driven to Mr. Blashfield's residence. There they celebrate, not only the glorious Fourth, but a wedding.

Early in the evening, the rich man's daughter, Rosabel Blashfield, had been married to Mr. Arthur Ware, the son of another Californian magnate. There had been the usual reception, the usual display of gorgeous presents, a fine band has been playing, professional dancers have done their part, now they are ready for Min Toko and his performances.

The whole lawn is flooded with electric light, and, in mighty tents all decorated with roses, they are setting forth a feast. The bride and bridegroom sit upon a sort of throne that seems made of orange blossoms.

Tiers of seats, occupied by people in evening dress, surround the lawn, leaving an archway through which the performers enter. It is opposite the bridal throne; and, as Min Toko passes through, bowing and smiling, his eyes meet those of the bride, and he seems to give her special greeting.

Standing in the midst of the circle he begins to gather, from heaven knows where, white roses of which he makes a mighty ball, how, no one can guess. This he throws towards the throne. As it floats in the air and opens, forth flies a little pink Cupid who flings kisses abroad, and flies skyward and is gone.



Forth flies a little pink Cupid.

Thunders of applause follow this compliment to the bride, and then the little boy-in-waiting on Min Toko brings in the chairs, the tables, the fans, the wands, the boxes, and the show begins.

It is sufficient to say that the man seems to be able to overcome the laws of gravitation, to stand upon nothing, to fold himself up like a foot rule, to put himself in spaces that seem impossible; and to do all this gracefully, with beautiful accessories.

The star is upon Min Toko's breast.

The bride's eyes never leave him. Min Toko did not boast falsely. Though his position and residence in Chinatown seem to her to place him so far beneath her as though she were an empress and he a serf, she has always admired him intensely, and she knows that he is in love with her.

She has often wished that he were of her race and kind. He has been made a sort of pet amongst the Californians before whom he has performed, and he has had opportunities to speak a few words to her, and, as he said, to kiss her hand three times. To-night she feels that she bids him adieu; and to-night he fascinates her strangely.

When at last, as usual, he inquires if any two of the audience will assist him in some closing performances, she whispers to her bridegroom:—

"Come, Arthur, let us go."

And the young man replies:—

"Awfully bad form; but, if you wish it, of course."

It is a look that Min Toko has given her that makes her do this thing, and the bridegroom hands her down into the centre of the lawn, and they three stand together there.

"Will you be pleased to help me fly this kite, sir?" says Min Toko to the bridegroom as he flings into the air the thing we know of. "See, this is how."

The kite darts upward swiftly in a moment. Its brilliant breast is no longer visible. Only a long copper-coloured cord shimmers in the air from Min Toko's hand moonwards.

"Come to me, all ye butterflies"! he cried. "Come, come!" And down the cord sweeps a myriad butterflies and cover the performer's bosom and vanish.

"Little mouse," he cried. "Come, little mouse!" and whistles exquisitely. And the little grey mouse creeps down, sits on his shoulder, and is gone.

"And now, Sir," Min Toko says, with a bow to the groom and a smile to the bride, "if you like you may call a blue bird, and a white bird, a red bird, a yellow bird, a green bird, and after that one of the stars from heaven." And he puts the cord into the bridegroom's hand, who calls loudly:

"Here, you blue bird, come if you can!" And there is a

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blue bird; and amidst shouts of merriment, and while the bride claps her little palms and showers smiles about her, the birds of all colours come down.

The green bird has arrived and disappeared, when suddenly the bride puts forth her hand playfully, and snatches the cord from the bridegroom's hand.

"You shan't have all the fun," she says, with a pretty pout. "I intend to call the star down myself. Ah, how the cord pulls! No, you shan't touch it. I will do it alone. What do you say, Min Toko? 'Brightest star of heaven, come to me!' Is that right?"

She beams on him, and lifts her sweet shrill voice and calls aloud, and far up in the sky appears a great diamond star that shimmers and glows as it comes earthward. And, with one wild spring, Min Toko snatches the cord from the bride's hand, saying something that she only hears as he does so, and at the same time pushing her fiercely from him.

Then the star is upon Min Toko's breast, and he lies upon the ground, and the gaudy kite flutters down and lies beside him; and those who gather about him see that he is dead, with the fearful burn of electricity upon his bosom.

The kite must have attracted it, they say. Plainly, when he snatched it from the bride's hand, he saw that there was danger. Poor fellow! How brave! How noble!

All night the bride weeps bitterly, and when, in the morning, her bridegroom bears her away, she is still broken-hearted.

The words that Min Toko whispered as he snatched the fatal cord from her are still ringing in her ears. She will never repeat them to anyone, but she can never forget them. They were: "Adieu, my love! I die for you!"

THE CRICKET

I.

A PERFECTLY formed little person, with hands and feet a duchess might envy, a miniature woman, with the fresh but freckled complexion given by life in the open air, with two big liquid black eyes which made the hearts beat quicker of those on whom they rested—such was Noeline Farques' the miller of Espitos.

A rickety old house, built over the stream, quite alone in a forest of alders, leaning over on one side, the life of the old stones taken out of them by their veil of ivy, with huge piles underneath, which looked like crutches; resounding continually with a busy hum like a woman's constant clatter—such was Noeline's home, the mill of Espitos.

Although it was old, the mill had faithful customers; and although the miller was small, she had many admirers. Among them, the most devoted were Aristide Lariensec, a big, red-faced fellow, son of a neighbouring miller; and Jonanin Lacaze, a pale blonde, who was serving his apprenticeship in one of the most important shops of the town.

Aristide, the miller's son, hung about the mill, his pockets full of fruit, for the young miller. They sat before the millstone and ate them, while the iron wheel sang its rhythmic song as the water poured over it, and the flour fell white and silent, powdering everything round.

Jonanin, the apprentice, was less fortunate. He could only see Noeline on Sunday after Mass, when she went to the shop in the town to buy needles and thread. Then, indeed, Jonanin was flushed with pleasure.

He spread out before the eyes of the young girl his whole store of thread and needles, and they were a long time in choosing, for sometimes their fingers met as they turned over the merchandise.

Sometimes on Sunday afternoon, Jonanin had two hours to himself, and he went to fish in the stream of Espitos. He did not catch much, for the stream had fewer fish in it than any in the country; but Jonanin placed himself so that he could both watch the window of the mill and his float; he consoled himself for the immobility of the latter by what he saw through the former. At nightfall Noeline came to look for her ducks along the bank of the stream, and the pressure of hands which the lovers exchanged in the Sunday twilight was so sweet that Jonanin dreamed for nights about it.

The miller did not hesitate between her admirers. She preferred Jonanin. She hardly thought of anyone else. When she was with him she was perfectly content.

Therefore, the blonde Jonanin was authorised to pay his court to her. Noeline's mother invited him to come and eat chestnuts at the mill during the long autumn evenings.

But the first time he went a strange thing happened. The cricket which always sang on the kitchen hearth was suddenly silent.

"It is so singular," thought Noeline's mother, and the young girl turned pale.

And when the young man made his second visit the cricket did just the same. As soon as the young man opened the door, the cricket ceased his song.

Then Noeline's mother crossed herself, and the young miller clasped her trembling hands under her apron.

And each time that Jonanin entered the house the hostile cricket was silent, and if they listened carefully they heard a strange noise, an inexplicable scratching at the chimney, like a protest of the little insect.

Noeline wept abundantly; her mother was very unhappy.

Both of them, like most peasants, attached great importance to the song of their cricket They knew that one of these insects singing in the house assures happiness and prosperity to its inmates. If it was silent when Jonanin came, it was because Jonanin brought ill-luck. It was imperative that he should stay away.

Nevertheless, Noeline knew that her suitor was good, honest, and laborious; she seemed to read promises of happiness in his tender grey eyes; but the cricket would not agree. It would, perhaps, be dangerous to despise its warning; and when the tired youth came, with a beating heart and a voice broken by emotion, to ask Noeline's mother for her hand, the mother was grave, and the young miller could hardly be kept from sobbing aloud behind her apron. Jonanin was refused. They did not give him the true reason. It would have pained him too much to learn that he would bring misfortune to any house he entered.

The mother found plausible reasons to give him, and Noeline went out to conceal her sorrow. She sat down near the millstone in the dilapidated mill, listening to the drops of water as they fell on the big iron wheel, and when she heard Jonanin shut the door and pass out among the alders, and along the bank of the stream murmuring to himself, it seemed to her that her heart had stopped beating, and she prayed to God aloud, as if she was afraid she should die.

The following week Jonanin left the country. With his clothes tied up in a little bundle he went away at dusk, when the last leaves were shivering on the trees. He went through the alder woods and along the bank of the little brook of Espitos. The young miller saw him come, and she stood motionless before her mill.

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"Good-night, Noeline," he said slowly.

"Good-night, Jonanin," she replied, dropping her eyes.

Then, as he went on, she ventured to ask:

"Are you leaving the country?"

He seemed to stagger on the leaf-covered path.

"Yes, I have found a place at Orthez."

She said nothing. Her fingers played with the little silver cross which hung about her neck, and with troubled eyes she watched Jonanin until he disappeared among the deepening shadows of the forest.

II.

A small, thin person, with hands and feet like those of a skeleton, looking as if nature had begun to make a woman and failed, but with two, big, black eyes much younger than her face, such was Noeline Farques, the miller of Espitos, twenty years after the departure of Jonanin Lacaze. Women in the south fade early. The mill, older by twenty years, and showing it, still stood across the stream, keeping erect by the aid of some additional crutches, and its tic-tac was just as joyous as when it was new.

Noeline had never married. After Jonanin went away no other lover could touch her heart. Aristide Lariensec, who who had loved her with a passionate, jealous love, had been refused like the others. The young man, long inconsolable, had married at last. He never came to see Noeline except to sell his grain. They had doubtless both forgotten the fruit they used to eat beside the millstone, where the flour fell white and silent, powdering everything round.

Jonanin had never come back.

Many and many a time Noeline had walked along the border of the stream with the hope of seeing him again. She thought of him every day; and every night when the cricket sang she dreamed melancholy dreams before her sad hearthstone, until her rushlight died out.

Alas! Orthez was so far off. People from Espitos never went there. At the shop in the town they had no news of Jonanin. What had become of the youth with the blonde hair? Sometimes, when her old maid's soul was sadder than usual, Noeline prayed for him, but little by little the beating of her heart grew cold and monotonous.

One night Noeline, who was forty-two years old, was waiting for Lariensec, the former rival of Jonanin. He was coming to discuss the price of the maize he wished to sell her. The miller had offered twelve francs five sous a sack. The farmer asked ten sous more. It was nearly nine o'clock. Noeline, standing on the threshold of the mill, saw someone coming.

"It is not Lariensec," she thought, "he would not come by that path."

The man had a wooden box on his back, he walked slowly, seemed tired, and looked at the stream and the trees and the mill as a stranger might.

"Good evening," he said, stopping. "Would you like to see Notre Dame de Lourdes?"

"He is a Béarnaise or a Bigourdan hawker," thought Noeline.

"My poor friend, it is rather dark to see your Virgin."

But as the merchant had a gentle voice, and as the intercession of the Virgin might induce Lariensec to sell his corn at twelve francs five sous the sack, Noeline said:

"Come in, I will look at the Holy Virgin by the light."

And the merchant entered. When Noeline could see him she felt the blood rush to her thin cheeks, and when the hawker had seen her face he seemed equally astonished. And in a plaintive voice he asked:

"So you are still here, Noeline?"

"Ah! good God!" said the miller, feeling her heart beat as it had not done for years; "is it possible that it is you, Jonanin?"

And for a moment they were silent. Then suddenly, behind the warm hearthstone, they heard the shrill chirp of a cricket.

Noeline felt in her eyes a warm moisture like a gathering tear.

Jonanin told his story. He had been successful at Orthez. He had married, had children, had a shop of his own, and was prosperous and happy. But after all these years the desire to see his old home had seized him, and for the sake of economy he had come, like a Béarnaise hawker, selling needles and thread on his way.

"Oh, I was sure you would succeed, Jonanin," sighed Noeline.

The cricket in the chimney went on singing. The woman seemed almost overpowered by her increasing emotion.

"Then why," stammered Jonanin, "will you tell me, Noeline, why you would not be my wife, twenty years ago?"

At first she could not answer; she pointed to the chimney as if half-ashamed, and would have been glad to hide her head in her apron, as she did when she was young.

"It was the fault of the cricket," she stammered.

"Of the cricket?"

"Yes! I was foolish. I thought you would bring me misfortune. The cricket stopped singing when you came to see me."

"He stopped singing? Why?"

Noeline shrugged her shoulders in sign that she did not know. They both stood silent, dreaming, and they dared not look into each other's eyes by the light of the smoking resin.

Very soon, Lariensec, the farmer, entered.

"Good evening, good evening," he said, after the peasant fashion, saluting as many times as there were persons in the company.

And when he had recognised the former shopkeeper—"What Jonanin! You here. What are you doing here?"

"I come to talk over old times. It does one good at our age."

"Ah, yes, the old times!" said Lariensec. "I remember that you were to have been married, you and Noeline."

"Certainly!" replied the miller.

"And do you know what kept us apart?" asked the merchant, "a cricket."

"Bah!" exclaimed Lariensec. "In fact, I seem to remember——"

He burst into a loud laugh.

"Ah! It was too good!" said he, "too good!"

Then, seriously:

"Bah! you are happy are you not? Both happy? We are all happy here; so we may confess our little peccadilloes of other days! Ah, that one was too good! Do you know, Jonanin, why the cricket did not sing? We are all friends, you know, old fellow. Well, it was because I was watching you; I scratched in the chimney there, on the side next our field, when you came to pay your court. Ah, other people loved Noeline, too, and other people were furiously jealous!"

Then, seeing that his revelation was coldly received, and that Noeline looked at him sadly, he resumed generously.

"That is not all; I come to tell you that I accept your price for your corn; twelve francs five sous the sack. Does that suit you, Noeline?"

And Noeline, in a low voice, replied:

"That suits me, Lariensec."

Then the farmer bought some spools of thread from the merchant from Orthez for his wife, and paid without bargaining.

"Good evening, good evening," he said, going out.

And the two old lovers were left alone.

They did not say much to each other. Jonanin slowly put up his merchandise, Noeline watched him, unconsciously turning over the little silver cross, which she still wore, with her bony fingers. For one despairing moment she was perhaps tempted to press her lips to Jonanin's hair, once blonde, now turning grey; but she restrained herself; her virgin lips were ignorant how to give such a kiss.

"Well, good-night, Noeline," said the hawker, lifting his box to his back.

"Good night, Jonanin!"

They awkwardly pressed each other's hands and parted.

He took the path through the woods on which the moonlight fell; she standing on her threshold watched him go, while in the chimney the cricket sang in the sad night, sang with a calm, clear, untiring voice, as if he wished to tell Noeline of all the happiness that might have been.

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"We were sitting on the deck of the *Konigin Carola*, gliding down the Elbe from Dresden to Weissen. Rogers was in a communicative mood, and was entertaining me with some good stories.

Here is one of them.

"When I first entered the Academy of Arts in Dresden I was a boy of nineteen, and a stranger in the land. If it hadn't been for certain good friends of mine who furnished me with introductions, I might have fallen into the hands of the enemy, and fared badly. However, as it was, I soon found myself on my feet, and before I had been six weeks away I had forgotten homesickness and everything else, and was indulging in a rigorous form of hero-worship. It came about in this manner.

"There are lots of young moneyed Englishmen always drifting about the Continent, and I suppose if they are not stranded in Paris at the first overture, they come on to Germany, and thus eventually to Dresden. At any rate, Bruce Holderness was one of these, and it was he to whom I had attached myself, worshipping from afar at first, and gradually admitted, step by step, into the circle of his friends. He was worth my homage then, and I think it was well for me that he accepted it as he did in his kindly, manly way. For the fact that he was extravagantly wealthy, and above the average in good looks and physique, I cared not a pin; it was the gentle manner, the true, noble heart, that brought me to his feet. What was I? A penniless art student, a dull fellow in any man's society. Yet he treated me as an equal—no, more, as a friend. He had a taste for art, it appeared, and he used to come down to the Academy every morning and work away industriously for pure love of the thing. However, one morning I caught him staring out of the window with a wistful expression, and his half-finished study of a classic subject tumbled into a corner. I asked him what it meant.

"'My friend,' he said, 'I have been fighting unsuccessfully with the desire to take up my palette and go and have a shy at landscape. The antique is all very well; but I am but mortal, and these classic beauties cloy the appetite. Give me just one hour down the river.'

"Now, curiously enough, this was just what had been bothering me, for though I am a plodder, I have my flights at fancy at times, so you can imagine how I jumped.

"'Put yourself into my hands,' I said, 'and light the fire with your picture, for I know the very place.' Half-an-hour later we were steaming gaily away down the stream.

"The very place was the Schonegrund, and, of course, Holderness was delighted. We stuck up our easels under the willows—the trout were rising like fun, by the way—and daubed to our hearts' content. There is a big farmhouse on the crest above the valley, and so, after we had painted our very souls out, we went up there to get a drink. Holderness thumped boldly at the door, and the person who opened it was Gisela Lichtenstein.

"You can have no conception of how beautiful she looked as she stood in the doorway. You would have thought that she was a princess. I felt Holderness give a sort of gasp—I say felt, because I was staring like an owl myself. However, he recovered himself at once, and took off his cap to her like a gentleman; and, as a matter of fact, I believe she was every whit as impressed with his looks as he was with hers.

"Well, we quenched our thirst with good Culinbacher beer, while the princess looked on and answered all Holderness's remarks in her Saxon dialect, and I never thought it pretty until then. I think we should both have stopped there for ever if the last boat hadn't been nearly due, and we had to be off. After we had scrambled on board I happened to look at Holderness's face, and I saw him gazing back at the Schonegrund with a look so different to that he had worn in the morning that it startled me. I wonder whether it really was undiluted nature he was pining for. Now I come to think of it, I don't believe it was.

"I suppose, knowing my susceptible nature as you do, you will think it very odd when I tell you that, after all, I didn't fall in love with the girl myself, but it is the sober truth. The annual exams came off a few weeks later, and whether it was want of leisure or not, I can't say, but except for a passing thought that she was worthy the canvas of a Titian, the Venus of the Schonegrund went clean out of my head. But presently I began to notice something.

"Up to that time Bruce Holderness had been as indefatigable in his exertions in the school as anybody; but, lo! little by little he dropped away. Morning after morning he would come, fiddle about with chalk and crayon for ten minutes, and then bolt, before I could get in a question as to the reason. I used to see him go along the terrace, and he always went in the same direction. At last I asked him point blank for an explanation, and to my amazement he blushed like a school-girl, said he had a sketch to finish out of doors, must take it before the weather changed, no time to wait, and hurried off.

"I was foolish enough to be first hurt, then terribly jealous, and at last, one morning, after the usual flight, I could stand it no longer. As soon as he had taken his hat I seized mine and crept after him. He was just buying a steamboat ticket at the kiosk by the pier, and forthwith I followed his example. I didn't, of course, know where he was going, but I saw him march on board the Meissen boat, and took my billet for that place accordingly. He went forward without looking behind him; I sneaked down into the stuffy cabin and hid there with many twinges of conscience, for I knew I was doing a cowardly and a mean thing.

"When the boat stopped at Kemnitz, Holderness stepped ashore, and not until that moment did a suspicion of the real facts of the case come before me. As I watched him turn up the lane to the Schonegrund, my memory travelled back to the vision in the doorway, and everything seemed to flash into distinctness. No! It was no sketching fit that could bring him here secretly time after time, and make him flush when I questioned him. Bruce Holderness was in love.

"This discovery, overwhelming as it was, did not prevent me making my way up the road that he had taken, though I kept a long way behind—so far, indeed, that I lost sight of him altogether. At one side of the valley a footpath runs along the side of the hill, hidden by a dense growth, and winding here, there, and everywhere, until, with a sudden dip, it lands one at the very edge of the stream. I took this path on account of its seclusion, for it was not the nearest, and walked on until an abrupt turn and the murmur of voices brought me to a standstill.

"Barely a dozen feet below me, on the wooden plank that spanned the stream, stood Holderness and the princess. His arm was round her, his face bent to hers—no need to ask further proof of his condition. As I looked their lips met, and I heard my friend murmuring amorous nothings in the vilest of villainous German.

"Well, I know, I was an eavesdropper, but I was afraid to stir. Presently the two seated themselves on the bank below me, hand in hand, and Holderness opened the conversation.

"'But you know, my Gisela,' said he, using the familiar *du*, 'I will arrange everything. A licence? Surely money can buy that here, as elsewhere. A trousseau? Wait till you are mine!'

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"'I am so terribly afraid,' said the girl with a sigh. 'Am I not betrothed to Conrad Meyer before all the world? How can you gainsay that? And then think what my father said when you spoke—I tremble at it still. The very next day he told Conrad all, and—well, you know. We are betrothed—there was a notice in the *Zeitung*, and, oh, heart's beloved, but I hate him!'

"'My darling!' said Holderness, 'when you are my wife we can snap our fingers at Conrad; and, as for the Herr Lichtenstein, he will forgive you even marrying an Englishman if you do but look half as sweetly upon him as you look now at me.'

"From their attitudes after this speech I judged that there was no fear of disturbing them, and turned away sharply, feeling as if I had desecrated a sanctuary. As I turned a hot breath fell on my cheek, a hand gripped my arm, and someone half dragged me up the path, out of earshot. Then he freed me, and I saw a big tow-haired German scowling down at me.

"'Another pig of an Englishman,' he said. 'Do you know that man yonder? You do? Then look here—here,' glaring at me with bloodshot eyes, 'I am Conrad Meyer, and I will kill him.'

"'No, you won't,' said I, 'not if I know Bruce Holderness. More likely he'll kill you.'

"The fellow snarled, but I think he was a bit taken aback by my answer, and I went on my way unmolested. I had little sleep that night, for the vision of the big German menacing my hero danced before my eyes, and my own dishonourable action had tied my tongue. However, the time went on, and Holderness still made his daily appearance at the Academy, though after that I saw little of him. Thus a fortnight passed.

"One evening I was sitting in my little bedroom, under the roof, when I heard someone scrambling up the stairs. It was a pleasing economy of our landlord to burn no gas there, as I knew only too well, and picking up my candle I ran out to help my visitor to the landing in safety. The light fell upon the face of Holderness.

"He was deadly pale, and over one cheek a red streak trickled slowly. I knew before he opened his lips how it came there.

"'Holderness,' I cried, 'what has happened?'

"He came into my room and sank into a chair while he told me the whole pitiful story. I needn't go over the incoherent explanation he gave concerning the facts I knew already; and, indeed, if I hadn't had my own knowledge to draw upon, I could hardly have understood him. But the rest, as far as I could gather, was simple enough.

"On that very morning he had planned that this wedding should take place, had procured his licence, and prepared everything for the event. Gisela was to meet him at daybreak on the plank bridge across the Schone, and together they were to make their way back to Dresden for the ceremony. Just as they greeted one another at the trysting-place in the grey light of what was to be their bridal morn, a figure stepped out from the bushes, knife in hand, and threw himself upon them. I think my friend would have kept his temper and disarmed the man, who, of course, was Conrad Meyer, if he had not let fall the foulest abuse upon Gisela as she stood cowering by. That was sufficient.

"'How it came about,' said Holderness, 'I cannot tell now. I only know that I was mad with fury, and I remember snatching the knife from his hand—he struck me with it here before I took it—and thrusting it into him as we struggled together. His grip relaxed almost immediately; everything seemed to swim before my eyes; and the next moment I saw a set, white face staring up at me from the water, and a look in Gisela's eyes that told me I was a murderer. I threw down the knife and went towards her, and she drew back with a look of horror, such as I pray you may never see in the face you love. Then I knew that I bore the brand of Cain indeed. I tore away from the spot like a madman, and now I am here to say good-bye. They shall not drag the whole story up at my trial, for by to-morrow I shall be across the border.'

"'And she?' I said.

"'I shall never see her again,' he said. 'But, at any rate, she is free from that demon. No, the truth will be proved, for from what I know there were witnesses to the whole. And now, my friend, I must say good-bye, for the arm of the law is long.'

"He wrung my hand without another word, and then the door closed and he went away into the night. From that time to this I have never set eyes on him; but though it is years ago now I think I could still pick him out from among a thousand.

"The story might well end here; but there is a sequel to it, which is, to my mind, as tragic as all the rest. You may imagine how anxiously I scanned all the papers for long after that, expecting every time to see some account of the affair, and how mystified I was as the weeks went by and not a word appeared. At last, more than a year afterwards, I made up my mind to revisit the Schonegrund, though there is no denying that I looked upon the place with horror. However, I took the boat as before, and walked up the by-path to the plank across the stream, and there stood looking down into the water, with the thought of what it had once seen. I suppose I was too deep in my reverie to notice the sound of approaching steps, and it was not until a heavy foot made the little bridge tremble that I became aware of them. As I live, there stood Conrad Meyer.

"He broke the silence with an ugly laugh.

"'Why,' he said, 'it is the little Englander! Has he come to the stream that would have drowned me?'

"I was so dumfounded that I couldn't say a word.

"'Come,' he went on. 'There was much truth in what you said that day, and I bear no malice. The only thing was, the *Schweinhund*, who has fled, would not hit hard enough. But you meant well, and if you like to come with me the Frau Meyer shall bring us a bottle of wine to drink your very good health.'

"'The Frau Meyer?' I stammered.

"'Born Lichtenstein,' he answered coolly. 'She makes a good wife, the dear Gisela, but somewhat quiet for my taste ——what! You won't come? Well, then, good morning.' He turned slowly on his heel and walked up the valley whistling, as placid as if the wreck of a life were an incident too trivial to be remembered. As for me, I left the Schonegrund more troubled than when I entered it."

Rogers stroked his moustache thoughtfully.

"And do you mean to say that she married that man after all?" I asked.

"I fancy it was not from choice," said my friend. "Who knows what pressure might not have been brought to bear while Meyer lay apparently at the point of death?"

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THE OUTLAWS OF THE AIR.

By George Griffith,

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "The Syren of the Skies," etc.

SUMMARY.

Max Renault—leading spirit of Anarchist Autonomia Group No. 7, who has joined the Utopians (a Socialistic colony on an island in the South Pacific) in order to steal the air-ship they are building, which he succeeds in doing.

Franz Hartog—a German engineer, in league with Renault, who steals a very fast torpedo-boat destroyer from the Russian Government to levy blackmail on the Atlantic.

Sir Harry Milton—a wealthy young English nobleman, who by chance comes across the island of Utopia, and subsequently devotes the whole of his fortune to hunting down Renault and Hartog.

Herbert Wyndham—a lieutenant in the British Navy who is travelling with Sir Harry for the benefit of his health, and who determines to resign his commission and couple his energies with those of Sir Harry in destroying the Anarchists, on account of the fact that he has been stabbed by Renault when the latter attempts to carry off Violet in the air-ship.

Frederick Austen—the inventor of the Utopian air-ship, who shares its secret with Edward Adams, Dr. Edwards, and Ambrose Miller, three other Utopians.

Violet Milton—Sir Harry's sister, and Lieutenant Wyndham's sweetheart, is terribly injured by throwing herself out of the air-ship on which Renault has tried to carry her off.

Dora Merton—a fair Utopian, who has made an impression on Sir Harry.

Lucy Summers—another fair Utopian.

Max Renault in the air-ship joins Hartog in the *Destroyer*, after the latter has destroyed a fleet of war-ships convoying Atlantic liners. They are discovered in their hiding-place by a combined fleet of British, French, and Portuguese cruisers, who follow the *Pilgrim*, a steam yacht bringing war and other materials for the Anarchists.

CHAPTER XVII.

The "Vengeur" in her Element.

Max saw at a glance that the *Destroyer* was heading out north-west on a course that would bring her into collision with the French Squadron first. A moment's thought showed him that this was bad tactics, and so, as the *Vengeur* swept along on her downward course, he swung her round to the southward and dropped almost to the surface of the water, within a hundred yards of Hartog's craft. The engineer saw the air-ship coming, and ran his boat close up to her.

"Keep a due north course until you sight a single cruiser that you'll find up there," shouted Max, as the two vessels came within hail of each other. "Go for her first, and stop her, if you can. Out yonder to the north-west there's a big cruiser and two torpedo-boats, or catchers, that may have a high speed. Leave them to me, for the present. Speak the *Pilgrim* as you pass, and tell her to run in as fast as she can and lie close. Good-bye; I shall depend upon you to stop the cruiser."

"I'll do dat! don't you fear," shouted Hartog in reply, waving his hand as the *Destroyer* gathered way again and shot off to the northward.

By this time the glasses of the officers on the bridge of the *Cécile* had picked up the *Vengeur* on her downward flight, and as Max mounted into the air again he saw the two catchers, both of which had a speed of over thirty knots, shoot out from under her side and steam away at full speed for the coast.

"Ah," he said to himself, "that's the game is it! I suppose you've seen me as well as the smoke from the *Pilgrim*, and so you think she belongs to us, and you'll try and head her off. Well, we'll see about that."

As only about ten miles now separated the *Aline* and the *Rance* from the *Pilgrim*, twenty minutes would suffice for them to run actually alongside of her, and less than that to get within range. The *Cécile*, steaming her best, came ploughing along in splendid style after her two scouts, and Max knew from what he had seen a couple of nights before, that she only needed a mark to fire at to vomit forth storms of shot and shell which would crumple the *Pilgrim* up as though she had been built of paper, and send her to the bottom in a few seconds.

He sent word to his men to stand by the guns and the bomb-tubes, and signalled to the engine-room for forty miles an hour. Then continuing his downward course, he made the *Vengeur* describe a wide spiral curve and checked her speed a thousand feet above the *Aline*, which was steering the most southern course, and so would be the first one to cross the track of the *Pilgrim*.

He observed with a grim sardonic sort of smile the manifest consternation that was visible among the sailors and officers on the deck of the *Aline*, as they saw her strange foe coming so suddenly to close quarters.

A thousand feet is only a little over three hundred yards. Allowing for the distance that he kept the *Vengeur* astern of her, five hundred yards would measure the range of fire between the two vessels. The elevation was so great that none of the machine-guns on board the *Aline* could be brought to bear upon him, but within a few seconds a score of men appeared on her deck armed with rifles which they raised in the direction of the air-ship.

"You idiots!" he laughed. "Do you think you're going to wing a bird like this with pop-guns like those?"

Then putting his mouth to the speaking tube that ran down to the forward gun-room, he said:

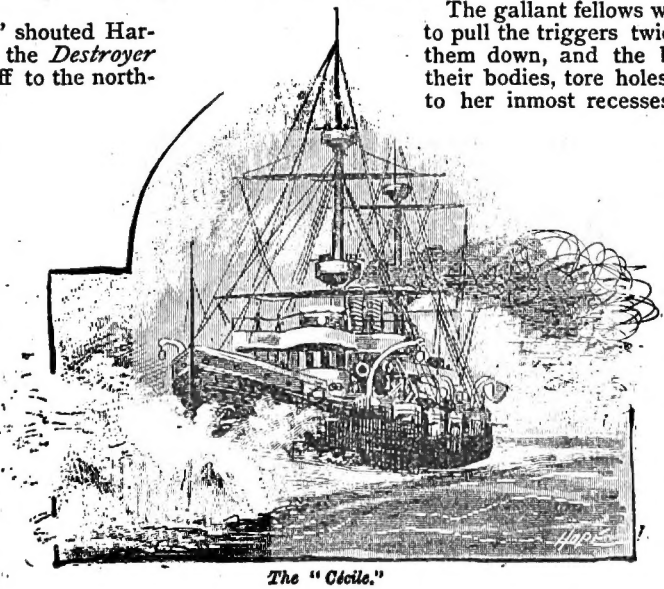
"Ready with the Maxims—Fire! and keep it up while there's a man on her deck."

Almost at the same instant the harsh grinding rattle of the machine guns reverberated through the air-ship, and two converging torrents of bullets rained down upon the decks of the devoted *Aline*. From stem to stern they riddled her as though her deck had been made of cardboard. Some half-dozen of the rifles were fired at once, but that was all.

The gallant fellows who held them hadn't even time to pull the triggers twice before the leaden hail struck them down, and the bullets, after passing through their bodies, tore holes in the decks and penetrated to her inmost recesses. Deck and bridge were alike swept clear by the storm of shot, and before the fire had been kept up a couple of minutes there was no living soul to be seen on board her. Then Max signalled for a little more speed, and as the *Vengeur* ran up over the catcher he called down another speaking tube:

"Ready with the bombs. Now, let go," and at the same instant he signalled to Taxil, "Full speed."

The *Vengeur* leapt forward and upward like an arrow, and as he looked back he saw a cloud of steam and smoke on the water, and that was the last that was seen of the devoted *Aline*.



The "Cécile."

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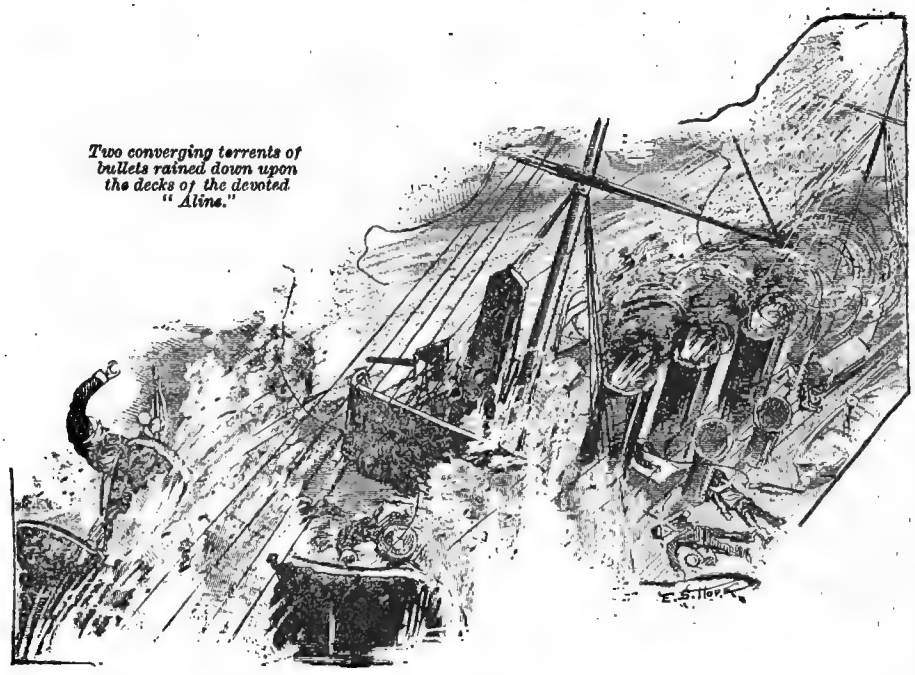

Two converging torrents of bullets rained down upon the decks of the devoted "Aline."

"One disposed of!" he laughed to himself. "This is the very devil's own style of fighting. I wonder what the poor beggars thought of it."

Then he called down the tubes:

"Bravo boys, that was excellently done! Now we'll go and talk to the other one. Stand by, and be ready."

Then once more the *Vengeur* swooped round, described a wide three-quarter circle, and placed herself a mile ahead of the rapidly advancing *Rance*.

"Ready with the Nordenfeldt!" he called down the after-tube. "Stand by to fire on the word. Get the range, and keep it."

A rapid signal went to the engine-room, and the *Vengeur* slowed down till a second signal told Taxil that she was relatively stationary to the catcher.

"Ready—Fire! and keep it up until I tell you to stop."

Then, with a grinding roar, the Nordenfeldt spoke, and, from an elevation of fifteen hundred feet, at a range of two thousand yards, a hail of shells swept down on to the helpless *Rance*. The first discharge flew a trifle wide and ploughed up the water a dozen yards from her side, but a moment later the aim was corrected, and then her decks seemed to curl and crumple up, her funnels were smashed into shapeless masses of iron, her bridge collapsed, a brief, sharp roar, and a rush of steam told that her boilers had burst, and, in twenty seconds she sank beneath the smooth, shining water, her plates torn asunder and riddled like sieves under the impact of the exploding shells.

"Well done, Nordenfelt!" called Max down the tube. "But be more careful with your aim at first. That's a good gun," he continued to himself, "and those shells of Hartog's are the very deuce for tearing anything up. I shall keep that pop-gun, I think. Now I wonder what Franz is doing?"

"Half-speed ahead," he signalled to Taxil, and the *Vengeur* shot forward at sixty miles an hour towards the coast. Then the bell rang "quarter-speed," and Max put his glasses to his eyes. As he did so the boom of a gun came up from the water, and a forty-pound shell from the *Destroyer* crashed into the bridge of the *Flores*.

"Bravo, Franz! Tonnerre! the man shoots like a perfect genius, and that was a good two-mile shot, too."

As he spoke a louder roar came up. Volumes of white smoke pierced by jets of flame rolled out from the cruiser's side, and the water was torn up into foam a hundred yards astern of the clouds of spray which now alone marked the position of the *Destroyer* tearing at her full forty knots an hour through the water.

"There goes another!" he cried again, looking ahead as the *Destroyer* swung round, stopped, and sent another shell home, which pierced the thin plates of the *Flores* a few yards aft of the stem and burst inside, blowing a great, ragged hole in her fore-deck. "I think I can leave you to tackle that gentleman. He's only a Portugee, after all, according to his flag. I'd better go and talk to the other one. She's coming up pretty fast, and if I don't stop her there may be trouble."

Quickening up to three-quarter speed, the *Vengeur* ascended once more, and swept in a long, graceful curve towards where the *Cécile*, with dense black clouds of French coal-smoke pouring from her funnels, was ploughing majestically through the water towards the scene of action.

Knowing that her armament was far more powerful than anything he had yet encountered, Max deemed it prudent to attain a height of four thousand feet before he commenced operations. But, unhappily for those on board the cruiser, she had been built and armed for sea-fighting, and, pitted against her agile ærial antagonist, she was almost as helpless as the two catchers had been.

If she could only have brought her armament, or even a portion of it, to bear upon the *Vengeur* she would have scattered her in fragments through the skies. Her fifteen 6½ and 5½ inch big guns would have vomited a storm of shell that would have swept her from the air like a feather, and her light quick-firing and machine-guns could have torn her to fragments even more quickly.

But the big guns in their barbettes could not be trained to a greater elevation than fifteen degrees, and the quick-firing guns, mounted behind their shields, were only capable of an elevation of twenty degrees, while the machine-guns in her military tops could only be fired horizontally or downwards. As a matter of fact, therefore, every one of them was out of action, as Max took care to keep the *Vengeur* so placed that nothing less than an elevation of sixty degrees would reach her.

This drove the captain of the *Cécile* to fall back on her small arms. The bugle sounded and the marines and naval riflemen formed up on the decks. The word was given and the rifles came up, but before a trigger could be pulled the *Vengeur's* Maxims spoke again, and the massacre began anew. Decks

Max put his glasses to his eyes

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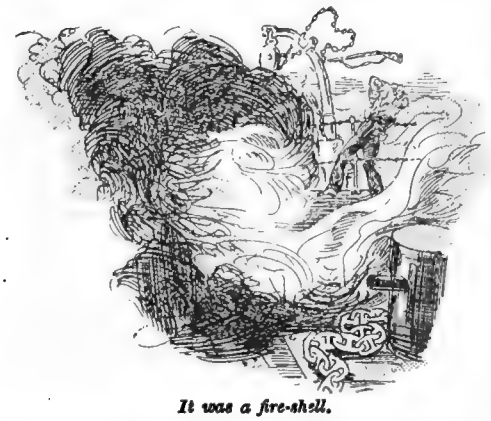
and tops and bridge were swept by the incessant hail as each of the two guns poured its seven hundred and fifty bullets a minute in a continuous stream down on the gallant fellows who, with their splendid batteries lying helpless around them, were incapable of making the slightest effective defence. A few bullets, already half spent, rattled against the sides and bottom of the *Vengeur's* hull, and chipped little pieces out of her air-planes, but that was all.

For five minutes the storm of bullets rained on, and when it stopped the decks of the *Cécile*, splashed with blood and strewn with mangled corpses, presented the appearance of a human slaughter-yard. The guiding intelligence of the big ship was paralysed, for not an officer remained alive on deck. Still she ploughed her way like some blinded monster through the water, and was fast nearing the *Flores*, which was still firing wildly as the *Destroyer* dodged and circled about her, when Max quickened up the *Vengeur* and called to the men at the bomb-tubes to be ready.

"Prepare to let go! One, three, and five with anarchite, two and four with fire-mixture, and send them out lively when I give the word."

"Now!" he cried, as the *Vengeur* slowed down again to the same speed as the cruiser, which now floated apparently motionless two thousand feet below, and a trifle astern of him. "Let go number one, and try the range."

The shell dropped into the water twenty yards ahead of the *Cécile*. He checked the speed of the air-ship ever so little, and ordered number two to be dropped. It was a fire-shell, and it struck the cruiser's forecastle a few feet aft of the stem. There was a bright flash, a flame, and a dense cloud of blue-black smoke swept aft, rolling along the decks, poisoning and suffocating the few poor wretches who still lay in their blood gasping for life, and long tongues of fire ran over the forecastle deck and down on to the forward gun-deck.



It was a fire-shell.

"That'll do," said Max down the tube. "Let go the rest, and go ahead."

The remaining shells plunged downward with ever-increasing momentum, pierced the protective deck as though it had been cardboard instead of steel, and burst below it, tearing it up in long strips as though a volcano had been raging beneath it. Volley after volley was sent down until the upper works of the cruiser looked as though her magazines had exploded and burst up through them. Her engineers and stokers and those of her crew whose duty had kept them below came crowding in a panic-stricken swarm up on deck, preferring, apparently, to die in the open air than to be scalded or burnt, or poisoned like rats in a trap. But still the pitiless hail of shells and fire-bombs rained on, and they were struck down and torn to fragments and hurled to the deck to writhe out their lives in agony in the midst of the flames and the suffocating fumes that kept bursting out incessantly among them.

It was horrible work—horrible enough to sicken the soul of any ordinary human nature; but Max, with the cold frenzy of murderous insanity chilling his blood, stood impassive in his conning-tower, and watched the slaughter that he could stay with a word, with no more sign of emotion than the compression of his pale lips and the angry gleam of the blood-lust in his eyes. The murderous dream that he had dreamt while speeding across the Pacific was already beginning to be realised in deadly earnest.

But even he soon had enough of blood and slaughter for the time being, and so, seeing that there was no one left on board the cruiser capable of firing a shot against him, he brought the *Vengeur* down to within three hundred feet of her deck, and told his men at the bomb-tubes to aim for the funnels with anarchite. In a few moments they got the direction, and half a dozen shells charged with the terrible compound passed in quick succession down the great tubes of iron. Then there came a shock that shook the air in which the *Vengeur* was floating, and after that a crash and a roar and a vast volume of steam, in the midst of which the stately *Cécile* split asunder and broke up and sank in rent and twisted fragments into the abyss over which she had so proudly floated but a brief half hour before.

"Bonjour, messieurs!" cried Renault with a harsh savage laugh. "You bit off a trifle more than you could chew, as the Yankees say, when you came out to tackle the *Vengeur*. I wonder what some of the sapient naval authorities of Europe would have thought if they had seen that little bit of the new warfare. Well, that's three disposed of under the hour, and I suppose Franz has made it pretty hot for the Portuguese by this time. I'll just go and see what he's doing, and then I must have a look at those fellows down south."

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Man and the Machine.

As soon as the *Vengeur* got over the scene of the duel between the *Destroyer* and the *Flores* he saw that, in spite of superior weight of metal and number of guns, the cruiser was getting decidedly the worst of it. In the first place her shooting was very bad, and, added, to that her speed was less than half that of her antagonist.

Hartog was pursuing his usual tactics. His rifled forty-pounder was thoroughly effective at four thousand yards, or over two miles, and he took very good care never to go within less than his range of the cruiser, and never to fire a shot until his range-finder told him that the aim was secure.

It was here that thee normous advantages of greatly superior speed were so strikingly manifested. The naval engagements between Japan and China in 1894 had demonstrated the fact that armoured ships of twelve to fourteen knots had no chance against unprotected cruisers armed with long range guns and possessing a speed of from nineteen to twenty-two knots. The swift ships had been able to choose their positions, shoot their bolts, and retire to a safe distance, returning when it pleased them.

Their commanders chose the speed at which the battle was to be fought. When they chose they could steam the same speed as the heavy ship, and so, for the moment, fire at a relatively stationary object, while their opponents, steaming their best, were still hopelessly out-distanced, and so were pounded at the leisure of their agile antagonists. But the difference between fourteen and twenty knots is, for fighting purposes, as nothing in comparison with the difference between nineteen and forty, as the commander of the *Flores* soon learnt to his cost.

He had fired broadside after broadside at the distant cloud of spray which was scudding along the surface of the water over two miles away, but never a shot had gone within a hundred yards of it. Of the *Destroyer* herself nothing was visible save for the brief moment in which she slowed down to send another shell home. The instant that the missile was despatched the light-heeled craft would spin round and dart away in an ever-changing direction, with the *Flores* vainly labouring after her and blazing away into the empty air and water. A glance to the southward showed the *Pilgrim* just disappearing into the inlet with the *Ariel* about two miles out to sea, and some four miles to the southward. Three miles behind her again the *Devon* was bowling along at full speed, flinging clouds of spray from her projecting stem.

"I think I've time to give that Portugee chap a dose of the Maxims," muttered Max as he headed the air-ship for the now sorely damaged cruiser. "One of those heavy shells might just touch the *Destroyer*, and then Franz's cruise would come to a pretty sudden stop, and that would never do."

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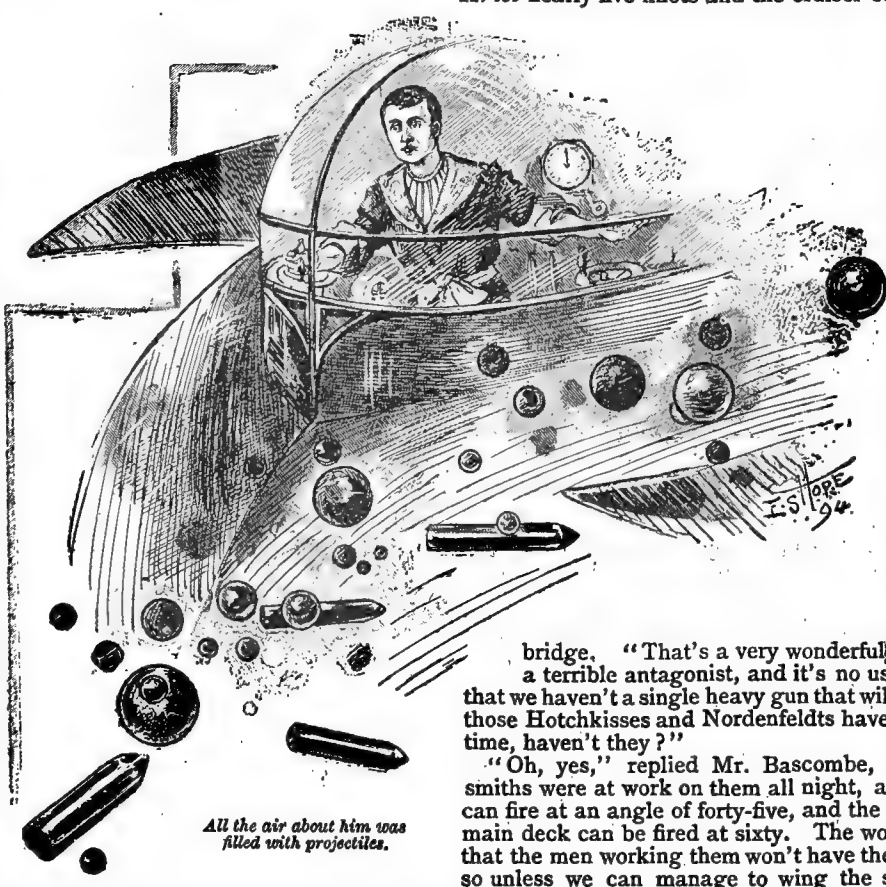
He pursued exactly the same tactics that he had practised with such fearful effect on the *Cécile*. First the continuous storm of bullets swept every living creature that was not under cover from the decks of the *Flores*, then came the hail of mélinite, anarchite, and fire-shells pouring from a height of two thousand feet vertically on to the doomed craft. As has been proved in the case of the Frenchman, no human valour or discipline could support the strange and horrible attack.

Engineers and stokers forsook their posts as the shells came crashing through the torn decks and burst in the ship's interior. The gunners left their guns and ran about, vainly seeking an escape from the flames and deadly fumes which penetrated into the barbettes and battery-chambers in defiance of armour plating and protective shields, and dozens of the unhappy wretches, maddened by the horrors that were multiplying about them, flung themselves overboard, preferring death by drowning to the torments of mutilation, burning, and poisoning that was the only fate that awaited them on board the warship.

In ten minutes the guns of the *Flores* had ceased to speak. Half her crew were killed, and the other half utterly demoralised. Meanwhile the *Destroyer* had been creeping nearer and nearer, watching for her opportunity. Firing shell after shell at a constantly decreasing range through the thin plates of the cruiser's sides, she at last got within five hundred yards of her, and then two torpedoes, one after the other, slipped into the water and made straight for the now almost motionless *Flores*.



All the air about him was filled with projectiles.

So utter was the panic on board the cruiser that no one noticed the two long streams of white bubbles which rapidly lengthened out as the deadly messengers sped at thirty miles an hour on their way.

Then in quick succession came two dull muffled roars, and two mountains of foaming water rose up, one under the cruiser's bow, and the other amidships. At the same instant one of her boilers, pierced by a projectile from the *Vengeur* blew up, and then, as though a hidden volcano had burst forth beneath her keel, her bow rose with a mighty heave out of the water, and she rolled over and went down with a sliding sidelong motion stern first to the bottom of the Atlantic.

These rapidly succeeding tragedies had not, of course, escaped the glasses of the officers of the *Devon* and the *Ariel*. Captain Maxwell, as brave and skilful a sailor as ever took a British ship into action, stood on the cruiser's bridge white with fury, watching the swift destruction which overtook the French and Portuguese vessels in succession, and every minute or two he signalled to the engine-room for more steam, although the *Devon's* boilers were throbbing and straining under the gallant efforts of the stokers, and the steam was hissing angrily from the safety-valves.

The sea was splendid for steaming, and the engines of the *Devon*, working at their utmost capacity, sent the splendid craft rushing through the water at a good twenty-two knots an hour. The captain and his officers knew full well that they were about to encounter no ordinary antagonist. An hour ago the *Cécile*, almost as powerful a cruiser as their own, with her two swift consorts had gone into the battle full of all the confidence of conscious strength, and now they and the *Flores* were lying shattered wrecks at the bottom of the sea, and of all their crews not a man was left alive to tell the story of disaster and defeat.

There was no valid reason why the fate of the *Devon* and the *Ariel* should not be similar. They recognised this, but their duty was to go on, and they went on. But apart from the dictates of valour and duty, there was another consideration. Even if they had wished to avoid the fight it would now have been impossible to do so.

The utmost speed that they could steam would leave the *Ariel* nearly five knots and the cruiser seventeen or eighteen knots an hour behind the *Destroyer* in a trial of speed, while the *Vengeur* with her hundred and twenty miles an hour in hand could fly over and round them in the inaccessible heights of the sky at any speed that her commander chose to select. But brave and all as were the hearts on board the *Devon* and the *Ariel* there was not one that did not beat faster as the moment of battle drew swiftly nearer.

"There's no doubt about it, Bascombe," said Captain Maxwell to his chief officer, who was standing beside him on the bridge. "That's a very wonderful craft, and I'm afraid a terrible antagonist, and it's no use disguising the fact that we haven't a single heavy gun that will touch her. I suppose those Hotchkisses and Nordenfeldts have been altered by this time, haven't they?"

"Oh, yes," replied Mr. Bascombe, "the armourers and smiths were at work on them all night, and those in the tops can fire at an angle of forty-five, and the ones we fixed on the main deck can be fired at sixty. The worst of it is, though, that the men working them won't have the slightest protection, so unless we can manage to wing the scoundrel pretty soon I'm afraid he'll pepper us hotly when he once gets the range."

"Well, we can't help that," said the captain. "I'm going to do my best to bring him down as long as the ship holds together, whatever the result is. I confess I don't like the job. It isn't fair and square fighting; in fact, it isn't like human fighting at all, engaging a brute of a thing that can fly up over your heads and just pepper you as he chooses. But still, that's not the question, and duty's duty, whatever you have to fight. What do the people seem to think of it?"

"Well, sir," replied the lieutenant in a low tone, "to tell you the truth, I'm afraid they're very uneasy. There's nothing that floats in water that they're afraid of, but they don't like the idea of that curious-looking brute flying about overhead. Still, they know what bloodthirsty scoundrels these fellows are, and I don't believe there's a man among them who won't die at his post before he thinks of showing the white feather."

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A man came running aft.

"I should hope so," said the captain curtly. "But there the blackguard comes. Heavens, what a speed he can move at! I'm afraid the days of sea-fighting are numbered, Bascombe. I shall fight the ship from the bridge. Let everybody keep under cover as far as possible. Signal to the *Ariel* to keep a good offing and not to try to force the entrance. The probability is they have got it crowded with torpedoes. Good-bye in case I don't see you again. The moment he comes within range, bring every gun you can work to bear on him and wing him, if you can. Everything depends on that."

The captain and his first officer, who were old friends as well as shipmates, shook hands as they left the bridge, the former to go to the conning-tower and the latter to take his place on the main deck to direct the working of the guns. The next instant the signal to the *Ariel* fluttered from the peak, and she began to move out from the shore, but the *Destroyer* was before her.

The *Ariel's* smoke made her position perfectly plain at any moment, but the low-lying blue-grey pirate craft was visible only faintly and at intervals as she rose upon the long Atlantic swell, or by the cloud of spray that she threw up when she put on speed. She ran away out to sea at thirty knots as if inviting the *Ariel* to follow her, for Hartog felt that he was quite justified in leaving, at any rate, the first part of the fighting to the *Vengeur*. The *Ariel* pluckily accepted the challenge at the same time that she obeyed the cruiser's signal, and ran out in the not very well-founded hope of bringing her to a hand-to-hand engagement.

Meanwhile the air-ship, which had dropped out of sight into the inlet to replenish her ammunition, rose again into the air, and, flying at sixty miles an hour, swooped down from the northward on an almost horizontal course at an elevation of about 2,500 feet. When he was within a mile point-blank range of the *Devon* every available gun was brought to bear on him, and a storm of bullets and twelve-ounce shells projected upwards into the air.

Max in his conning-tower saw the flash and the smoke, and a few seconds later he beheld an extraordinary and unparalleled sight. All the air about him was filled with projectiles, apparently floating slowly in the air as though they were tiny balloons instead of solid shot and steel shells. They rose to within a few yards of him and then, taking a sharp downward curve, dropped out of sight.

He looked sharply at his aneroid and read: 2,400. He locked the steering-wheel for a moment and pulled the lever that inclined the slats of the air-planes. Then, as the *Vengeur* soared upward, he took a stump of pencil and a piece of paper from his pocket and made a rapid calculation.

"Ah!" he said, glancing at his paper and then down at the cruiser. "That's the game, is it! I'm glad you spoke soon enough. That quite settles the business as far as you're concerned. Let me see. I suppose those guns have an elevation of fifty-five or sixty degrees, say, a two-thirds angle, and the range was about a mile. Initial velocity, probably 2,500 feet a second. My elevation, 2,400 feet. If I drop a projectile vertically from that height it takes a trifle over eight seconds to fall, and drops with a final velocity of, say, 3,000 feet a second.

"That's the pull of gravity, ignoring the resistance of the air, which is the same in both cases, *ergo*, a bullet fired vertically upwards with an initial velocity of 2,500 feet, comes to rest within eight or nine seconds at somewhere within 3,000 feet, and falls back again. That's how gravitation fights on the side of the *Vengeur*. Good! And that's why those shells came floating about me like feathers. Very curious, but perfectly satisfactory. Now we'll try the Nordenfeldt."

He gave his orders down the tube, and passing over the *Devon* at a height of 3,200 feet he swung his ship round and brought her to a standstill a quarter of a mile astern of the cruiser. The moment he stopped the machine-guns of the *Devon* got to work again, and again the air below the *Vengeur* was filled with floating projectiles.

"Try one or two shots to get the range François," he said to the man at the gun, "and when you've got it, let her have it hot."

Then came the short sharp bang of the gun and the brief whistle of the projectile. Max followed it with his glasses and saw a tiny splash in the water twenty yards or so from the cruiser's stern. Then the gun spoke again, and the second projectile struck the water only a few yards from her starboard side amidships. A third shot grazed her port forward barbette; the shell burst with a bright flash, and the fragments glanced harmlessly from the heavy armour.

"That's better," muttered Max. "He'll get her next time."

And so he did, for the fourth shell struck her square amidships just aft of the after-funnel. A cloud of steam on her deck showed that the steampipe had been cut through. François had got the range now, and in rapid alternation the three barrels of the Nordenfeldt hurled shell after shell with fatal precision on to the exposed deck of the cruiser. It was in vain that volley after volley of projectiles was launched up into the air. The missiles reached the point at which the down-drag of gravitation equalled the energy exerted by the gun, and then they curved downwards and dropped into the sea.

To the men working the guns on board the *Devon* it seemed as though they were fighting a supernatural antagonist, floating serene and unarmed amidst a hurricane of bullets. They knew they had got the range and the elevation, but, as far as they could see, not a shot touched him, or, if it did, the air-ship was bullet-proof. Uneasy as they had been before the duel began, they now showed a nervous excitement, which their officers saw would take very little to turn into absolute panic.

Military writers had often prophesied that, hard as it already was to keep men steady under artillery fire on land, it would be practically impossible to do so if it ever became possible to fire upon them from the air. It was not long before this prophecy was fulfilled on board the *Devon*.

There are no braver men on earth than the sailors who fight under the White Ensign, but they are only made of flesh and blood after all, and when the *Vengeur's* shells, striking with a velocity of over five thousand feet a second, pierced the steel decks as though they had been paper, and drilled clean holes down through decks and bulk-heads and burst in the lowest recesses of the ship, sometimes even piercing her bottom and blowing great ragged holes in her thin plates underneath the armour line, rumours began to run from lip to lip, men looked at each other and shook their heads, and all their officers could do barely sufficed to maintain discipline and even the semblance of steadiness.

The decks were already riddled in fifty places. The military tops were smashed to fragments, the funnels torn and twisted out of shape; scores of men were lying maimed and mutilated

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about the deck; and all the machine-guns save one four-barrelled Nordenfeldt were dismounted and out of action, while down below shells had penetrated even into the recesses of the stoke-hole and burst there, blowing the stokers to pieces, and scattering the blazing coals of the furnaces throughout the narrow confined space.

Meanwhile the speed of the cruiser had dropped from twenty-two knots to sixteen, and then it had gradually slackened down, as furnace after furnace was rendered useless, until she was barely making five knots. Then suddenly the fire from the air-ship ceased.

All this time Max had kept her speed regulated with wonderful dexterity according to that of the cruiser. Now she forged slowly ahead until she floated exactly above the masts of the *Devon*, and then those who were left on her deck saw their terrible enemy sinking gently down towards her. In this position not a gun could be brought to bear upon her, but, determined to die fighting to the end, the brave fellows ran for their magazine carbines and ammunition and opened a hot but, as far as they could see, perfectly ineffectual fire.

After the first volley the *Vengeur* stopped in her descent and rose slightly, then there came a spattering sound on the deck and in the water. Something struck the deck close to where Mr. Bascombe, who was now the only deck officer left alive, was standing, and flattened out. He stooped and picked it up. It was one of their own bullets which had been fired perpendicularly into the air and had fallen back on their own heads.

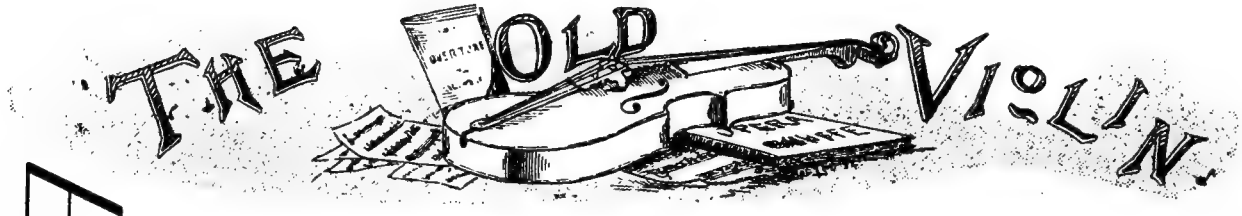
As he was looking at it a sailor standing near him collapsed and dropped in a heap on the deck, struck down by one of his own comrade's bullets.

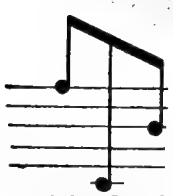
"Cease firing!" cried the first officer at once. "He's too high to hit, and we shall only get the bullets back on our own heads."

Those were the last words that a gallant gentleman and a thorough sailor ever spoke. They had scarcely left his lips when there came a blinding flash, a deafening report, and he and every man who was standing near him were hurled off their feet and flung lifeless and mutilated in every direction from the focus of the explosion. Then there came a silence, a silence of death and wordless horror, and in the midst of it a man came running aft from the fore-deck pointing to the northward, and shouting wildly:

"Look, boys, look! There's another of these mechanical bird-machines coming up hand-over-fist yonder to the norrard, and by the great Cæsar's ghost, she's flying the good old Union Johnny. Hooray! Oh, my God, what's done this?"

(To be continued.)





She has moved a little nearer
To the Master of all music.
HIAWATHA.

THE first bell tinkled from the stage, the gas lights flared up brightly, the audience streamed into the theatre, and the members of the orchestra came up from their underground retreat, each with his instrument under his arm. The leader moved here and there, whispering to this one, calling that one's attention to a particular passage, and speaking, half aloud, over the heads of the others, to one who sat behind.

There was more stir than usual among the orchestra, and one would know, without consulting the play bill, that the music of the piece was an important part in the programme.

The second bell sounded. The voices were hushed, and the instruments taken in hand. The conductor appeared—a young, genteel-looking man. Nodding lightly to the leader, he stepped to his place of honour, then, like a field-marshal, reviewed his troupe. A satisfied smile flitted over his face—then suddenly it darkened. There, among the violins, he discerned an empty chair.

"Who is missing there behind?" he asked.

Many heads turned quickly. "Habermann! Habermann!" was the answer.

"Ah, he shall be punished for this!"

Then came the third signal. Its vibrations had not died away when a little insignificant-looking man rushed to the empty place, pulled his violin from its cover, placed his notes in order, all with feverish swiftness.

The conductor rapped, looked to the right, to the left, then straight ahead. His lifted arm sank, and with a thunderous roll of drums the overture began.

The late comer must have been running, for his breath came in quick short gasps, and flakes of melting snow still clung to his coat. He held his violin upright upon his knee, and stretched his head far forward to see his notes.

At the end of the first act part of the audience went out, but the orchestra remained in full numbers.

"Habermann!" said the conducter, "come this way."

The individual addressed looked up uncertain. Had he been called?

The contra-bassist, a large, rough, but good-natured man, shook him by the arm. "Come, old marmot; can't you hear?"

He understood then. "Marmot" could only mean him. Stumbling, for he was very short-sighted, over several things in his way, he stood before his master, who looked down upon him imperiously.

"My man, you have the privilege of the unpunctual. Confess! What have you been about?"

Like a whipped dog the old man looked up at the speaker, but his face remained cold and expressionless.

"Can you not speak?"

"Perhaps he is in some love affair," the mirthful violin-cellist could not refrain from saying.

"You will be kind enough to keep your foolish humour to yourself," said the conductor. "And you—old man—of course you will pay the ordinary penalty. If this happens again, I shall obtain your dismissal through the director. You know very well you are not wanted here—only tolerated. Enough!"

With a grand gesture he turned away, and the old man stumbled back to his place.

A strange figure was this Habermann. Small and thin, his face of an ashy grey hue, surrounded by a bristly grey beard, and bristly grey hair stood up defiantly over his head. His eyes were close drawn together by his near-sightedness. His trousers were too short and his coat too long, both of uncertain age. When out of doors, to this outfit was added an old hat, and an old knitted scarf that was wound many times round his neck, and the long ends either hung down in front, or were blown back, flaglike, by the wind. His form was well known

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by every boy in the streets through which he passed in going to and from the theatre.

The second act began. The stage represented a scene of Oriental splendour that astonished even accustomed theatre-goers. And the musicians, indifferent, from long familiarity with such things, might have been seen stretching up their heads here and there, in the passage, to get better views of the unusual magnificence. Only Habermann showed not the least curiosity.

In the long interval the stalls were soon deserted, save by some aged people. Habermann's companions vanished to the underworld again. They all passed him, and each had some nonsense to drop. He was the scapegoat on whom was turned all their good and bad humour. They were, in the main, good-hearted men, having not the least thought of doing him harm, but they never knew it to be, or thought it could be, different. Habermann himself had never protested. Only by a shadowy drawing of the face that took the place of a smile did he show that their bantering was noticed.

The last one to go by was the contra-bassist. Clapping his hand on the old man's shoulder, he said:

"Come, Papa Habermann, your cup of coffee will be cold."

It had been Habermann's custom to take a cup of coffee in the long interval—the only refreshment he allowed himself in the theatre.

"Thanks," said he, "not to-night. I took one at home."

He certainly spoke falsely then, for he had eaten nothing the whole day but half a roll; the other half was still in his pocket. He wished for nothing then but to be alone. He thought, "Is she asleep—the refreshing slumber that brings the sick to health?" Oh, if it could be so! But the physician that day said he had no hope of her recovery. She might live weeks or months, and she might go to-day or to-morrow. There was nothing certain about these lung diseases. His daughter—his Elfrida—and dying! She who was the essence of his thoughts and feelings, she who was his life—going from him for ever! No, it could not be! It must not be! God would not allow it!

For twenty-four years Nicodemus Habermann had been second violinist to the Y. theatre orchestra. He belonged, in a measure, to the establishment, as did the chandelier that hung from the ceiling. His wife also came from the same theatre. How he had found courage to ask the important question of the quiet, pleasant, by no means young person, was a theme that racked the brains of his colleagues for a long time. But he had done it and succeeded.

It was certainly no fierce passion that they experienced; but they understood each other, and their marriage had been happier than many so-called love matches. Two years they lived together, quiet and contented, then his wife died at the birth of her child.

Nicodemus became still more quiet and dejected. He lived only for his child. What a wonderful girl she was! Her form was dainty and white as a porcelain figure; her hair was fine, soft, and glossy like spun glass; her eyes bright and dancing like the waters of a trout brook; her laugh as silver clear as sweet toned bells. There were hours when Nicodemus was confounded and puzzled that this graceful, charming creature was his child; when he scarcely dared touch her with his big hands, fearing he might do her some harm.

What foolish things they did together! How she danced when he crawled on all fours about the room! How she sprang upon his back and tried to hold him by the hair, but never succeeded, it was so short and bristly!

How many times had she, sitting in his lap, seized his neckband, and pulled upon it until he was purple in the face, he saying no word, because it seemed to give her pleasure to maltreat her father in that childish way! He endeavoured to gratify every wish she expressed, and once, when she wanted the moon, he had considered, with all earnestness, how he could fashion for her something resembling that luminary.

The years slipped by. Elfrida was a wonderfully pretty girl. People often turned to look after them when he walked with her in the street. She wanted to attend a select girls' school, and he denied himself proper food in order to save the tuition fees. She learned readily, and he rejoiced in her progress.

One day she expressed a wish to accompany him to the theatre. That disturbed him very much, and for the first time he denied her request. Should she be a witness to the ignominious rôle he there played? Should her pure child mind be poisoned by the piquant operettas there brought out? Elfrida pouted and wept. She knew, she said, her papa loved her no longer. What had she done? All her schoolmates visited the theatre; only she, who had the best opportunity, could not.

Habermann was conquered. He could not see her weep, so she went with him. Seated in a vacant seat in the front row of the stalls, she followed the performance with glowing eyes. Her presence worked wonders in the orchestra. Through the entire evening Habermann was treated with perfect respect.

On her way home Elfrida could not find words to express her pleasure. Oh, the singers! How charming it must be to sing like that! Then to receive such oceans of flowers! Yes, she would be a singer, and then her dear papa would not have to go to the theatre every night, but stay at home eating cakes and sweetmeats. Habermann listened with shining eyes. Yes, a singer she should be.

Again years went by. Elfrida had blossomed out into a young woman, left school, and, under the instructions of a celebrated professor, was cultivating her voice. The economy of the father had to be still more severe, for this professor was none of the cheapest. But how richly was Nicodemus paid when he saw the progress of his daughter, and heard the professor's enthusiasm over her talent, and his prophecies of a brilliant future!

A charity concert had been planned, into which was to be drawn the highest musical talent of the city, and which promised to be the event of the season. The professor thought this a grand opportunity to bring out his brilliant pupil.

The evening came. A distinguished audience filled the large, richly-decorated hall. Far back against the wall, pressed into a corner, stood Habermann, with a programme in his hand. A glimmering was before his eyes, a roaring in his ears.

He could not have been more stirred had he suddenly been called upon to play upon his violin over there upon the stage. His only fear was that Elfrida would lose self-command; if she kept that, he was sure all would go well.

A storm of applause stirred him anew. The exotic, order-decked piano virtuoso had bowed and left the stage. Now she must come! Habermann felt his heart beating as if it were in his throat and he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. A low whispering ran through the assembly. Elfrida appeared, led by the professor. There she stood, flower decked, before that thousand-headed Moloch, the public.

An indescribable air of innocence aud purity surrounded her. Her golden hair enveloped her fresh young form like a mantle. People nodded approvingly at each other, and a young man near Habermann said, "By Jove, that's a pretty girl!"

The pause seemed longer than usual. He saw with horror that she was confused. The professor turned impatiently. She raised her head and looked towards her father. The visible distress on his face made her forget her own, and drawing herself up decidedly, she mastered her embarrassment.

Her first notes were low and hesitating, but grew louder and firmer, and finally came out in all their strength and purity. One could scarcely believe there could be such power in that childlike form. Her strength increased with the difficulty of her part, and nothing in her execution betrayed the beginner.

For a time Habermann could see nothing. The tears rolled down his cheeks. Only with his ears could he revel in those heavenly strains. Oh, to think it was his child—his own flesh and blood—who held that large audience in such breathless rapture.

The applause came like a hurricane. She stood for a moment with her hands pressed over her beating heart, while the flowers spread out about her like a fragrant garden. Her eyes sought her father, but he has slipped out into an anteroom, and sinking into a chair, with his head in his hands the

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sounds came into him like the dull roarings of the sea. That hour made good his whole life of sorrow and disappointment. He had not lived in vain.

There was a still more stormy burst of enthusiasm. They called for an *encore*—but Elfrida appeared no more. The professor came instead to say the young singer had been taken suddenly ill—nothing serious—but she could not appear again that night.

Habermann heard himself called. He hurried to the green-room. How strangely the artistes looked at him! One pressed his hand sympathetically, and told him his daughter had been taken to the private room of the manager. Why was there so much emotion over a little indisposition? In spite of himself, a feeling of apprehension seized him. As he entered the manager's room he saw Elfrida, with face pale as death and closed eyes, lying on a couch. The front of her white dress was stained red. He looked with dazed eyes at those who stood about her. What did it mean?

An earnest-faced old man came to him and took his hand.

"Control yourself, my friend," said he. "The tender constitution of your daughter was not equal to the strain of the evening. A blood vessel has been ruptured. She can, perhaps, be well again, but she can sing no more."

With a cry that was hardly human, Habermann sank by her side.

The next day's papers contained long, exaggerated accounts of the affair. A young singer, till then unknown, had appeared and, by her loveliness of person, as well as her unparalleled singing, had won all hearts; but, while the applause still rang through the hall, she had fallen behind the scenes, purchasing success with her heart's blood.

For some days after the concert the unfortunate singer was much talked of; then other matters came up, and she was forgotten.

Troublous days followed for Nicodemus. There were times when Elfrida seemed to be recovering—when she could laugh and joke—but those moments of light made the night that followed all the darker. The lung disease made rapid progress. They had moved far out into one of the suburbs of the city, that she might have the benefit of purer air, for a journey to the south was beyond his means, however much he might economise.

For the last few days she had been worse, and that was the cause of her father's lateness at the theatre. How tiresome the music seemed to him, with its endless repetition! If it would only end, so he could go home!

At length the curtain fell for the last time, and Habermann rushed out as he had rushed in, as if fearful someone would restrain him. Through the wide-opened portal poured a thick, black stream of humanity, laughing and talking about the magnificence of the performance. Coachmen were shouting; pedestrians hurrying, and the snowflakes whirled down without intermission through the misty air, covering the street with smutty, grey pulp.

Pushing through the crowd, every moment in danger of falling under the carriage wheels, hurried Habermann, with his violin under his arm. Turning into a quieter street, where the snow kept more of its whiteness, he pressed his hat more firmly upon his head, drew the skirt of his coat under his arm, and walked as fast as the moist snow would allow. The passers-by looked after the curious figure, and many snow-balls flew about his ears, but it did not trouble him; he only rushed forward—forward.

On, by the great factory, whose tall chimney reared ghost-like into the night; by the churchyard, whose white crosses and monuments seemed signalling to him of the uncertainty of all earthly things; by fair mansions, with their carefully-trimmed gardens. At last, quite exhausted, he stopped before an old house. With trembling hands he opened the heavy gate, then went through the long, dark yard, to the little garden house where he dwelt. A middle-aged woman, with pleasant, though coarse, features and sleepy eyes, met him in the entry.

"Oh, I am glad you have come. Elfrida has asked after you so many times."

"How is she?" he asked, eagerly.

"She has been sleeping for a little while. Try and not wake her. Good-night. I will lie down now."

She had the door latch in her hand, but turned again.

"If——if——anything happens," she said, hesitatingly, "call me."

As she disappeared Habermann looked after her, shaking his head. "She is a queer woman. What does she think can happen?"

He pulled off his wet coat and boots, put on an old dressing-gown, and pushed his feet into a pair of slippers; then opening the door carefully, he stepped to the bedside of the sick girl.

She was still lovely. Her blonde hair surrounded her head like a halo, but her face was white, white as the linen of her bed. With an expression of unutterable tenderness he looked down upon her. Her breath came quick and short. Opening her eyes, she stretched her arms to him.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said, as he kissed her upon the forehead.

"But I shall have to scold you that you do not sleep. Truly, you give your papa a great deal of trouble;" but the tones of his voice gave the lie to his words.

She stroked tenderly his knotted hand, and looking up, said: "Can't I talk a little with my dear papa? Come, sit here and tell me about the new performance."

"Oh, my dear child, what is there to tell? You know I care nothing for that nonsense; my thoughts were with you."

She made no answer, but soon after, looking up suddenly, said:

"Papa, I wish you would play for me upon your violin."

"Oh, child, you must not think of it! It would excite you, and the doctor said you must be perfectly quiet."

"But I feel so well—to-day—so light—better than I have for a long, long time."

"Truly?" His whole face lighted up. "Then sleep now; perhaps to-morrow I will do as you wish."

She put her arms round his neck and snuggled her cheek to his.

"When I say it will be a great, great joy for me, and beg you to gratify me, will you not do it now?"

"Yes, yes, I will," he whispered.

She kissed him tenderly. "My precious papa! Now I shall sleep so much better. Give me a good night kiss."

He pressed her to his heart as he gave it, then laid her back among the pillows.

He took his stand by the window, as far as possible from the bed, and set the bow with a trembling hand. The tones of the old cradle song, "Sleep, my child, sleep on," sounded low through the room.

Then the playing became more lively, and he handled the bow more firmly. The simple, soulful melody awoke soaring phantasies. The longer he played the more the artist within him was aroused. All that had lain in his heart through the long years, under the cares of life as under an ash heap, came up to the light. The tones exulted; they wept and lamented. A divine fire beamed from his eyes; the glow of inspiration was upon the cheeks of the man who had at last found himself. Ever more heaven-inspired and spiritual, they became a sacred prayer to the Lord of life and death. He stood a few moments motionless, with bowed head, when he ended, as if listening to the dying tones; then, breathing fast, laid aside the violin.

Softly he stepped to the bedside. What was that? He hastily seized her hand, then laid his grey head on her young breast, but there was no sound of a heart beat. A blessed, happy peace rested upon her features. He knew then why she had felt so light and happy.

There was a cry and a fall, then all was still in the little room save the rattling of the window sash and the ticking of the clock. Habermann lay there on the floor for a long time, then arose tottering like a drunken man. His features were fixed and bloodless, as if carved from ice. He took his violin and dashed it in pieces against the wall; he broke the bow over his knee; then sat down and leaned his head upon the bed of his dead child. He had played the finale of his life.

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THE AGENT'S STRATAGEM

AUGUSTINE LAFONT was the confidential agent of a large banking-house in Paris. Early in the spring of 1832 he set out from Paris with bills, notes, drafts, etc., to the amount of over a million francs, for a house in Chaumont. Much secrecy had been observed in the preparations for his journey, as the kingdom was at that time infested by a secret organisation of thieves. Lafont had the notes concealed in various parts of his dress, and taking the heavy diligence as the best mode of conveyance, he set out on his mission.

Nothing worthy of note occurred to arrest Lafont's attention until he had passed nearly through the Department of the Seine-et-Marne, when, just at nightfall, two well-dressed gentlemen hailed the diligence, and claimed passage to Chaumont. It was already too dark for the agent to clearly distinguish the features of the new comers, but yet, from what little he could see, he at once made up his mind that their countenances were not unfamiliar to him, and, having come to this conclusion, he determined to watch their movements, for a vague suspicion that they had by some means become possessed of the secret of his business took possession of his mind.

The diligence crossed the Seine at Nogent, and there remained for the night. As soon as Lafont had opportunity to examine the countenances of the strangers at the supper table, he became satisfied that his first impressions were correct, for one of the travellers, at least, he had seen in Paris on the day before his departure, and he could not but notice that they both eyed him with marked interest.

After supper the agent lighted his cigar and walked out on to the bridge, where he remained nearly half an hour, at the end of which time he started back towards the inn, and just as he arrived at the door he noticed his two travelling companions entering the stable.

Prompted by a feeling of curiosity, he followed them, and as he came round by the stable door he could just see the two men crouching away in an empty stall. With a stealthy, cat-like tread, he approached, and he was fortunate enough to make out the gist of their conversation.

When Lafont left the stable he knew that the two men had left Paris for the purpose of robbing him, and that they intended to put their plan in execution as soon as the diligence should have entered the Department of the Upper Marne.

He returned to the inn, and after considerable reflection he determined to procure a horse and secretly pursue his journey. Having come to this conclusion, he went to the driver of the diligence, and under the plea of having to remain in Nogent on special business for a day or two, he settled his fare thus far; then he went to the stable and ordered a horse to be in readiness for him by three o'clock in the morning, at the same time enjoining upon the garçon the strictest secrecy with regard to his movements.

As soon as these arrangements were made, Lafont retired to his room. He, of course, knew that his secret had leaked out, and even in his proposed course he was not entirely free from danger. A million francs was a large sum, and if the two Parisian robbers had set their hearts upon its possession, he had yet some work to perform ere he would be entirely free from them. Last of all, a new idea struck him, and, obtaining a number of papers, he neatly folded them in an envelope, which he strongly sealed and bound with a blue ribbon.

At three o'clock in the morning, while it was yet very dark, and, before any one else was stirring, Lafont quietly descended from his room and went to the stable. The garçon was easily aroused, and in a few moments the agent was on his way to Chaumont.

For two hours he rode on his way, but, instead of pursuing the high road from Treves, he again crossed the Seine, and kept along by the banks of the Aube. Daylight was just beginning to streak the eastern heavens, when Lafont thought he heard the sound of horses behind him, and it was not long ere he knew that he was being pursued, and in ten minutes he was assured that the two robbers were after him.

In a moment the agent leaped from the saddle, and, seizing a heavy stone, he inflicted a severe bruise upon one of his horse's fore legs. The animal reared and plunged, but Lafont managed to hold him, again mounted, and rode on; but the horse limped and staggered beneath the effects of the blow he had received, and, in a short time, the robbers came up.

"Ah! Good morning, gentlemen," said the agent, as he reined in his lame steed, at the same time raising his hat with affable politeness. "So it seems you, too, are tired of the lumbering diligence."

"Yes," replied the foremost of the two men, "the diligence did not exactly suit our convenience, so we took horses."

"And you are bound to Chaumont?" asked Lafont.

"Yes, on important business."

"That is fortunate," said Lafont, with the utmost earnestness, "for you may, if you see fit, do me a great favour. I, too, have important business at Chaumont, but I fear that without assistance I shall not be able to accomplish it. I have, gentlemen, in my possession a vast amount of valuable papers, and intended to have continued on my way in the diligence, but at Nogent I received the intelligence that there was a plan on foot to rob me.

"Do not start, gentlemen, for what I tell you is true. And for that reason I set off thus alone, but my horse has met with a sad mishap, and I fear the robbers, who, I think, are yet at Nogent, may overtake me. Now if you are going directly to Chaumont, perhaps you would be willing to take my package in your charge and deliver it to M. Augient at his office. Any one there will tell you where it is. Then, if I am overhauled, the robbers will find nothing, and, of course, you will not be suspected. If you will thus accommodate me you shall be suitably rewarded. What say you, gentlemen?"

The two men exchanged significant glances during these remarks; and, after a moment's consultation, one of them said:

"You seem to be ready in trusting strangers, sir."

"Oh, not at all, sir," returned Lafont, with a frank smile, "I would much rather trust honest travellers than run the risk of meeting with robbers. You see just now how I am situated, gentlemen; and, if you will do me the favour I ask, you shall not regret it. I shall stop at Arcio, and change my horse, and then follow you."

"Well," said one of the men, "we will do your wish, and meet you at M. Augient's office."

"Then I thank you most heartily," said Lafont, and as he spoke he took a closely-sealed packet from his bosom and handed it over. "In this," he said, "there are valuable papers, and I trust you will use all discretion in their care. Now the robbers may overhaul me as soon as they like."

After some further directions given in an honest confiding manner, Lafont bade his new messengers Godspeed, and ere long they were out of sight. The agent turned his horse's head back towards Nogent, where he arrived in safety, and on the next morning he procured a guard, and once more took the diligence. The robbers stopped at the first convenient place to examine their prize, but their chagrin can be better imagined than described when they found that they held only a securely bound parcel of waste paper. They knew that they were suspected, and, of course, they dared not push the matter further.

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Printed and Published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON, at "Pearson's Weekly" Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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HOW SHOULD STOUT LADIES DRESS?

Some considerable controversy has been going on in one of the American fashion magazines on this subject, started by the threatened inundation of crinolines.

Fancy a fat lady in a crinoline! Or better still, fancy ten fat ladies in ten fat crinolines, with, say, five a side in a none too fat omnibus!

The Yankee humorist says: "A fat lady can beat a fat man; she can stick a stiletto-like pin through her head till it comes out the other side and hold on her bonnet, but the fat man can't." Let's have those ten pins to complete the picture of those ten crinolines. Would we of the sterner sex not like to "lynch" the fiend who invented mountainous hats and feathers for front rows in theatres? Blondin can walk across Niagara on a tight rope, but can he walk a theatre corridor with three ladies' trains in front of him? The fashion miscreant, and the barbed wire inventor, have much to answer for. One fashion paper argues that if the portly lady adds a little slashing of light on a dark backgrouud, artistically and judiciously, it has the effect of *apparently* reducing her size by half a stone. How ludicrous all this seems! What is the seven pounds *imitation* reduction? We have known Mr. Russell, the eminent Specialist on Corpulency, reduce a lady eleven pounds in seven days, and not an *imitation* reduction, but an absolute fact, at a cost of probably less than is paid to the "faking" dressmaker. Those who are acquainted with his methods, or have read his work, "Corpulency and the Cure," can bear us out that he talks with as glib unconcern of fourteen-pound, twenty-eight pound, and even half-hundredweight reductions of unhealthy waste accumulations as a steamboat stoker would talk of coal. The dressmaker simply attempts to hide the disease—creating adipose, carried about by the unfortunate victim to obesity—whereas Mr. Russell (of Woburn House, 27, Store Street, London, W.C.) aims to remove the cause, and thus impart health. Of course, no lady likes the brute of a man who enters into a crusade against tight-lacing in a blunt common-sense way; but he is, however, right when he claims that tight stays with *embonpoint* is suicidal, especially when a few doses of a most pleasant, agreeable, and exhilarating tonic, made entirely from herbs, will reduce one's weight so easily with a corresponding improvement of health and strength, and with it that bright eye and healthy complexion which we all like to see in a lady. If our roof leaks and lets the rain in, we can shelter ourselves from it by opening an umbrella; but if we get the slater to stop the cause, he is the true benefactor, and not the umbrella maker. So it is with the reducer of fat and the dressmaker. The fair sex begin to see that he is their benefactor; he does not ruthlessly rip up the bodice, like uncouth Dr. Abernethy; he is better informed, for he actually knows that in twenty-four hours that identical inimical appendage will be in a state of subjugation. In other words, a dangerously tight lacing on Monday will be slack by Tuesday, after taking three simple doses of his mixture. "Has one to starve one's self?" asked a lady once. Not at all, for it is a singular fact that one eats more under his treatment.

It is perhaps not singular, if we investigate. A fat man is unhealthy; he is, in fact, diseased; as the disease is being cured the organs become healthy, the patient is more buoyant, and takes more exercise, and requires more food (it is also traceable to other reasons without exercise). Then, again, with stilt-like high heels, fashion—well, I think we had better drop this theme. we shall get into hot water with our fair readers; we are married. We generally get the old bachelor-editor to write on these subjects; he is not a bit afraid of women, as he calls them.

But seriously, if any lady, or gentleman, as far as that goes, wishes to reduce their weight, we commend them to Mr. Russell's work, "Corpulency and the Cure," which is published at Woburn House, Store Street, London, W.C., and only costs 4d. in stamps, post free. But to revert to the subject of crinolines, honestly we are pleased to see the really sensible and steadfast way in which ladies have made their standpoint, and we suggest that they should have a medium of their own to rule the fashions to their own liking, and not be the victims of the profit-seeking professional modiste.

DO STOUT PEOPLE LIVE LONG?

This is a question which has occupied the attention of medical authorities from time immemorial. Some argue that the lean kind take longer to shuffle off the mortal coil than their stout brethren. The statistics naturally favour this argument, and no doubt are correct to a great extent, because sufferers from obesity are more susceptible to disease in consequence of the debilitated state of the system when clogged with abnormal adipose tissue; but a curious fact has been overlooked, viz., that corpulency generally commences about the age of thirty-five to fifty, after which time it seems to decrease; therefore, before the proverbial "three score and ten" is reached, the whilom fat man is, by a natural process, again reduced to what may only be called moderate plumpness, and thus cheats the statistician. Stout persons can now, thanks to science, reduce their weight in a most extraordinarily rapid manner, without the slightest injury to their constitutions, or without resorting to those drastic remedies which only operate for a time, or by the continuance of the use of toxical drugs extending over such a period that renders it baneful to the long-suffering patient. An eminent Continental therapeutist recommends the victim to obesity to eat fat meat, while an equally eminent American prescribes lean ditto, and the stomach is to risk an accumulation of serious disorder by swallowing a pint of hot water daily, a most nauseous remedy, we should think, and not unattended with danger. The past master in the cure of corpulence is Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, London, W.C., whose book (256 pages), entitled "Corpulency and the Cure," price only 4 stamps, seems to impress us considerably, for he reduces more weight by his system than the Continental and American physicians, without any of the absurd restriction which would make life scarcely worth living. He uses simple herbs, the properties of which he seems to possess a more than usual knowledge of, and he makes but little secret of his method, so refreshing after the mystery made of most chemical and herbal concoctions of various complaints.—*Wetherby News.*

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